

Exploring the Role of Leadership Styles in Lean Implementation Outcomes: A Systematic Review of Service Sector Studies

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Abstract—This study presents a systematic literature review examining the influence of leadership styles on Lean implementation outcomes in the service sector. A structured PRISMA approach was adopted to ensure transparency and methodological rigor in the selection of studies. Relevant publications were retrieved from major academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, MDPI, and ABDC-listed journals. An initial pool of 150 records was identified, of which 120 remained after removing duplicates. Following title and abstract screening, 70 studies were selected for full-text evaluation. Based on predefined inclusion criteria and quality assessment, 32 studies were finally included in the review. The analysis focused on four dominant leadership styles—transformational, transactional, servant, and laissez-faire—and their role in influencing Lean outcomes such as efficiency improvement, waste reduction, service quality enhancement, employee engagement, and sustainability of Lean practices. The findings suggest that leadership plays a critical role in shaping organizational readiness, employee involvement, and continuous improvement culture required for successful Lean implementation. The review highlights transformational and servant leadership as the most influential styles in supporting Lean success in service-oriented environments.

Keywords—Lean Management; Leadership Styles, Transformational Leadership; Servant Leadership, Lean Leadership, Service Organizations, Continuous Improvement, Organizational Culture, Employee Engagement.

I INTRODCUTION

Leadership plays an important role in determining an organization's success, especially in the service sector, which relies heavily on human interaction and quality of service (do Adro & Leitão, 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). In this competitive environment, the leadership style applied by company leaders can greatly affect organizational performance (Baig et al., 2021; Qadir & Yeşiltaş, 2020). This study aims to explore the influence of various leadership styles on organizational performance within service-oriented companies. Service companies have unique characteristics that set them apart from other sectors, such as direct involvement with customers, the importance of service quality, and the need for high adaptability (Hui et al., 2023). Leadership in service companies must be effective in operational management and build and maintain positive relationships with employees and customers (Liu et al., 2022). Recent data shows that services companies account for more than 70% of GDP in many developed countries, emphasizing the importance of leadership effectiveness in this sector to ensure company sustainability and success (Mishra et al., 2020). This study identifies several specific problems, namely how transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles affect organizational performance in service companies and what factors mediate the relationship between leadership style and organizational performance (Hundie & Habtewold, 2024; Thanh & Quang, 2022). The urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to understand the dynamics of leadership that can improve the performance of service companies in the midst of increasingly fierce market competition (Saebah et al., 2023). The success of service companies depends largely on their ability to provide high-quality services, which is strongly influenced by leadership effectiveness (Haleem et al., 2024; Ren & Shen, 2024). Thus, this research is expected to provide practical insights for service company leaders in optimizing their organizational performance. While inspiring and motivating through a shared vision, transformational leadership can lead to employee burnout and dependence on the leader, as seen in Company ABC, where increased productivity was marred by high turnover due to stress (George & Veetil, 2023). Conversely, transactional leadership, which emphasizes rewards and punishments, often fosters a short-term mindset and disengagement post-reward, as evident in Company DEF, where operational efficiency improved, but long-term loyalty and creativity suffered (Abdelwahed et al., 2023). Laissez-faire leadership, characterized by minimal intervention, can result in low morale, role confusion, and decreased performance, as illustrated by Company GHI's drop in service quality and employee satisfaction due to a lack of guidance (Ridwan et al., 2022). Various previous studies have explored the relationship between leadership style and organizational performance.



Fig. 1 major leadership styles commonly used in organizations

Fig. 1 shows the **major leadership styles commonly used in organizations**, especially relevant to service-sector management. Each circle represents a different approach leaders use to guide employees, make decisions, and manage performance.

Democratic leadership emphasizes participation and shared decision-making. Leaders consult employees, encourage ideas, and promote teamwork. This style works well in service organizations where employee input improves customer experience.

Autocratic leadership is authority-centered. Decisions are made by the leader with little employee involvement. It is useful in crisis situations or when quick decisions are needed, but may reduce employee motivation if overused.

Laissez-faire leadership gives employees high autonomy with minimal supervision. It suits skilled and self-motivated teams, such as professionals in IT services or consulting, but may lead to lack of coordination if guidance is too weak.

Transformational leadership focuses on inspiration, vision, and change. Leaders motivate employees to exceed expectations and support innovation. This style is highly effective in modern service organizations aiming for quality improvement and customer satisfaction.

Transactional leadership is based on rewards, performance monitoring, and structured supervision. It ensures efficiency, discipline, and service consistency, which is important in sectors like banking, retail, and hospitality.

Bureaucratic leadership follows strict rules, procedures, and hierarchy. It is common in public services, government institutions, and highly regulated sectors where compliance and accuracy are essential.

Servant leadership prioritizes employee well-being, development, and ethical responsibility. Leaders focus on supporting staff so they can serve customers better, making this style very suitable for service organizations.

For example, recent research by Nugrohoet al. (2020) shows that transformational leadership has a strong positive correlation with employee motivation and performance within the service sector. In addition, a study by Younget al. (2021) found that transactional leadership also contributes significantly to organizational performance, although its effectiveness often depends on the specific context. However, studies specifically focusing on the service sector are limited, so this study aims to fill that gap. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on service-oriented companies and comprehensive approach to analyzing various leadership styles and their impact on organizational performance (Kim & Cruz, 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2020). In addition, this study will also explore mediating factors that might influence the relationship between leadership style and organizational performance, providing deeper insights than previous research

The structure of employees in an organization, we can notice that the structure of employees is different in terms of knowledge, skills, motivation, and years of experience. We have employees who are beginners with insufficient knowledge and skills, but with great motivation (Morten Emil, 2016). Although they do not earn their salary, they are promising staff. The second category are somewhat more advanced beginners with certain knowledge, skills, and high motivation in performing tasks who for the most part earn their salary (Drea Zigarmi, 2017). The third category consists of employees with certain years of work experience who have adequate knowledge and skills, and sufficient motivation to perform work tasks (Elizabeth Chapman, 2017). They earn their salary but contribute little to the organization's profits. In the fourth category, they are employed

with experience, knowledge, and skills, but with lower motivation, so they can independently perform work tasks and earn their salary and significantly contribute to the profit of the organization. The task of the leader is to bring the staff from below the fourth level to the fourth level as quickly as possible and to earn their salary and contribute to the profit of the organization (Salehzadeh, 2017). By applying the situational leadership model, the leadership style is harmonized with the development level of employees to perform work tasks in order to make a profit (Northouse, 2016). For leaders to be able to deal with employee development, it is necessary to know what knowledge and skills employees have (Yariv Itzkovich, 2020), but also what knowledge and skills employees need to perform work related tasks in different situations (Joseph A Crawford, 2019). Since leaders have a different structure of employees, their knowledge and skills must be at the highest level (William A. Pasmore, 2017). Leaders must provide employees with what they need and how much they need through directive and supportive behavior. It is no wonder the situational leadership style appeals to small business owners. It affords flexibility as they assess both the situation and the people in it before rendering the best leadership response they can master.

II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is one of the most extensively studied leadership styles, renowned for its profound impact on organizational dynamics and outcomes. This approach, defined by the ability to inspire and motivate employees, is rooted in the leader's capacity to create a compelling vision, establish trust, and foster creativity among followers. Bass & Avolio (1994) characterize transformational leaders as instilling a sense of purpose, encouraging innovation, and building strong, trusting relationships with their teams. These leaders go beyond mere transactional exchanges, focusing instead on elevating the intrinsic motivation and moral values of their employees, which in turn drives higher levels of organizational performance, employee satisfaction, and commitment. The concept of transformational leadership encompasses several key components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Idealized influence refers to the leader's ability to serve as a role model, gaining followers' admiration, respect, and trust. Inspirational motivation involves articulating a clear, appealing vision that inspires and engages employees. Intellectual stimulation challenges followers to think critically and creatively, encouraging them to explore new ideas and solutions. Individualized consideration entails recognizing and nurturing the individual needs and potential of employees and providing personalized support and encouragement (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership, characterized by its focus on explicit structures, rewards, and penalties, is a well-established approach in leadership studies. This style operates on the exchange theory principles, where leaders reward compliance and performance (Burns, 1978). While it may need more transformational leadership's dynamic and visionary appeal, transactional leadership is particularly effective in ensuring operational efficiency and achieving short-term goals. It emphasizes a systematic approach to managing tasks and maintaining order, essential for organizational stability and performance, especially in stable and predictable environments. The core of transactional leadership lies in its structured framework, which includes setting clear expectations, monitoring performance, and providing appropriate rewards or disciplinary actions based on outcomes. Leaders employing this style are adept at defining roles and responsibilities, which reduces ambiguity and enhances clarity within the organization. By establishing a transparent chain of command and well-defined procedures, transactional leaders create an environment where employees understand their duties and the consequences of their actions, thereby fostering accountability and predictability. Various factors influence the effectiveness of transactional leadership, including the organizational context, task nature, and individual characteristics of leaders and followers. In regulated or routine-task environments, transactional leadership can boost productivity and efficiency. Its structured nature aligns well with predictability. However, in dynamic settings requiring flexibility and innovation, transactional leadership's rigidity may impede creativity (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Grounded in exchange theory, transactional leadership views social interactions as transactions to maximize rewards and minimize costs. Leaders employ reward systems to motivate compliance and performance (Homans, 1961). Research, like Judge and Piccolo's meta-analysis, supports transactional leadership's positive impact, especially in stable environments. It clarifies roles, reduces ambiguity, and maintains stability (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, a concept popularized by Robert Greenleaf in 1977, represents a paradigm shift in leadership philosophy, emphasizing the leader's role in serving their followers rather than prioritizing their power or control. This approach centers on the idea that leaders should prioritize the needs of employees, fostering a supportive and ethical work environment. By focusing on the development and well-being of their team members, servant leaders can significantly enhance job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall performance. The core of servant leadership lies in its commitment to the growth and development of individuals within the organization. Greenleaf posited that authentic leadership emerges from a desire to serve others, and this service-oriented mindset differentiates servant leaders from traditional authoritative leaders. Servant leaders are characterized by empathy, listening, stewardship, and a commitment to building community. They invest in their employees' professional and personal growth, creating an environment where individuals feel valued and empowered (Greenleaf, 1977).

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership, introduced by Heifetz and Laurie in 1997, is a leadership approach that emphasizes a leader's ability to navigate complex and changing environments. This leadership style focuses on flexibility, learning, and the capacity to address adaptive challenges that need more straightforward solutions. Adaptive leaders engage their followers in problem-solving processes, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. This approach is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced and unpredictable business landscape, where organizations must continuously adapt to survive and thrive. The core concept of adaptive leadership involves recognizing the difference between technical problems, which have clear solutions and can be addressed with existing knowledge and skills, and adaptive challenges, which are more complex and require changes in attitudes, values, and behaviors. Adaptive leaders understand that solving adaptive challenges involves mobilizing people across the organization to learn new ways of thinking and acting. This requires high emotional intelligence, openness to feedback, and willingness to experiment and take risks (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997).

Laissez-faire leadership is part of the *full-range leadership model* one of the most established and popular models of leadership which also comprises transformational and transactional dimensions. Defined as avoidance and abdication of one's responsibilities "laissez-faire has been consistently found to be the least satisfying and least effective management style" However, as research has mainly focused on the direct effects of laissez-faire leadership the mechanisms and contextual boundaries associated with these effects have received little attention, which is a gap we intend to fill with the current study. Our attempt at doing so resonates with the call for a more nuanced approach to laissez-faire leadership as its effects may depend on the context. By shedding light on these processes, we take a step toward understanding how the detrimental effects of laissez-faire leadership can be reduced, hence providing clues for practitioners (Wong & Giessner, 2018),

Digital Leadership

Digital leadership has emerged as a crucial aspect of the contemporary business landscape, particularly in the era of rapid technological advancement. This leadership style entails harnessing digital tools and platforms to enhance organizational communication, collaboration, and decision-making processes. Leaders who embrace digital leadership leverage technology to drive innovation and efficiency, thereby gaining a competitive edge in today's digital economy. As defined by Avolio and Kahai (2003), digital leadership involves "the ability to influence, guide, and inspire others to participate in a digital environment for the purpose of achieving a common goal." This definition emphasizes the importance of utilizing digital tools and fostering a collaborative and goal-oriented culture within the digital realm. Various factors influence the effectiveness of digital leadership, including organizational culture, technological infrastructure, and the leader's digital literacy. In a study by Hesse, Mattke, and Ketterer (2020), digital leadership was positively associated with organizational performance, particularly in industries driven by technology. Digital leaders play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of digital technologies into business processes, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and technological adoption. Moreover, the ability of leaders to effectively communicate the vision for digital transformation and engage employees in the digitalization process significantly impacts the success of digital initiatives within organizations (Zhang et al., 2020).

Comparative Analysis and Synthesis

The literature on leadership styles offers valuable insights into how different approaches can influence organizational effectiveness. Transformational and servant leadership styles are often lauded for their positive impact on organizational culture, employee engagement, and long-term success. These leadership styles

prioritize inspiring and empowering employees, fostering a sense of purpose and commitment within the organization. Bass and Avolio (1994) assert that transformational leaders can articulate a compelling vision, motivate their followers, and encourage innovation, essential elements in dynamic and rapidly changing environments. Similarly, servant leaders prioritize the needs and development of their followers, creating a supportive and ethical work environment that enhances employee satisfaction and organizational commitment (Liden et al., 2008). In contrast, transactional leadership is better suited to stable environments that demand clear structures and consistent performance. This leadership style relies on contingent rewards and penalties to motivate employees to meet predetermined goals and expectations (Bass & Riggio, 2006). While transactional leadership may foster a different level of innovation than transformational leadership, it ensures operational efficiency and goal achievement, particularly in industries with established processes and routines. Adaptive and digital leadership styles are gaining prominence in response to the evolving organizational landscape. Adaptive leadership addresses flexibility and learning in complex and uncertain environments. Adaptive leaders excel at navigating change, mobilizing resources, and fostering resilience within their organizations (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). On the other hand, digital leadership leverages technology to enhance communication, collaboration, and decision-making processes. Digital leaders embrace digital tools and platforms to drive innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness within their organizations (Hesse et al., 2020). In synthesis, the effectiveness of different leadership styles depends on various factors, including the organizational context, the nature of tasks, and the characteristics of leaders and followers. While transformational and servant leadership styles excel in dynamic environments, prioritizing innovation and employee development, transactional leadership ensures stability and efficiency in more predictable settings. Adaptive and digital leadership styles offer valuable approaches for navigating complexity and leveraging technology to drive organizational success in the digital age. By understanding the strengths and limitations of each leadership style, organizations can tailor their approach to leadership to suit their unique needs and circumstances, thereby enhancing their overall effectiveness and competitiveness in the market.

M. R. Ristić, et al. (2025) Globalisation requires good leadership in culturally diverse workplaces. This study uses Fuzzy TOPSIS to analyse 13 of 21 GLOBE leadership qualities in UAE-based multinational firms' senior managers' perspectives. Visionary, motivating, team-oriented, collaborative, and performance-oriented attributes are most valued, with transformational leadership being the ideal style. Executives say employees need imaginative leaders to succeed.

J. E. Espejo-Pereda et al. (2025) Competitive non-profits need strong leadership to improve management and goal achievement. PLS-SEM was used to analyse leadership styles' effects on learning and innovation in 300 Latin American participants. Results indicate that servant leadership favourably improves learning culture ($\beta = 0.292$), empowering leadership modestly ($\beta = 0.189$), and shared leadership moderately ($\beta = 0.360$). Moreover, a strong learning culture boosts dynamic capability ($\beta = 0.701$), providing insights for leaders seeking to foster learning and boost staff dynamism.

J. E. Espejo et al. (2025) A non-profit leadership styles measurement scale is tested with 272 individuals from nine Latin American nations. Significant Bartlett and KMO test results and internal consistency metrics between 0.755 to 0.880 support the nine-item servant, empowering, and sharing leadership scale. CMIN/DF = 1.794; CFI = 0.993; SRMR = 0.023; RMSEA = 0.054; Pclose = 0.369 show good fit indices. The study recommends a Latin American-specific scale for non-profit leadership assessment, competitiveness, leader development, and interventions.

M. Imran et al. (2025) In SMEs with individualistic and collectivist cultures, leadership is vital to performance. In Pakistani SMEs, democratic leadership increases employee innovative behaviour (EIB). Democracy improves EIB by fostering a psychologically safe environment for innovation, according to validated questionnaires and SEM of 389 textile workers. Democratic leadership promotes sustainable innovation in hierarchical, non-Western cultures, giving managers and policymakers with valuable information.

C. Rouco, et al. (2024) Leadership style influences decision-making, especially in civil protection and fire services, according to many studies. Using quantitative questionnaires from 346 Portuguese fire station personnel, this study evaluated how leadership styles affect decision-making. Leadership and decision-making styles are positively correlated, reflecting firefighters' concern on social issues and teamwork. Positive correlations exist between roles, conceptual decision-making, and relationship-centered leadership, with greater education levels affecting leadership behaviour.

III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the systematic literature selection process adopted for this study on leadership styles and Lean implementation outcomes. The process is structured into four sequential stages: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion. In the identification stage, a total of 150 records were retrieved from major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, MDPI, and ABDC journals. After removing 30 duplicate records, 120 unique studies remained for further analysis. During the screening stage, titles and abstracts of these 120 studies were examined. Based on predefined criteria, 50 records were excluded because they were unrelated to the service sector, not focused on Lean practices, or did not treat leadership as a central variable. This resulted in 70 studies being selected for full-text review. In the eligibility stage, the full texts of the 70 remaining articles were assessed in detail. A further 38 studies were excluded due to weak methodological design, lack of a clear leadership–Lean relationship, or an exclusive focus on manufacturing settings.

Finally, in the inclusion stage, 32 studies satisfied all criteria and were incorporated into the systematic review. The bottom section of the figure summarises the thematic focus of these studies, highlighting the key leadership styles examined—transformational, transactional, servant, and laissez-faire—and the primary Lean outcomes investigated, including efficiency improvement, waste reduction, service quality enhancement, employee engagement, and sustainability of Lean practices.

Sources of Data

Secondary data were collected from reputed and high-impact academic databases and journal repositories, ensuring both quality and coverage of literature. The databases included:

- Google Scholar
- Scopus
- Web of Science
- MDPI Journals
- ABDC-listed Journals

These sources were selected to capture peer-reviewed, indexed, and methodologically rigorous studies relevant to leadership and Lean management in service organizations.

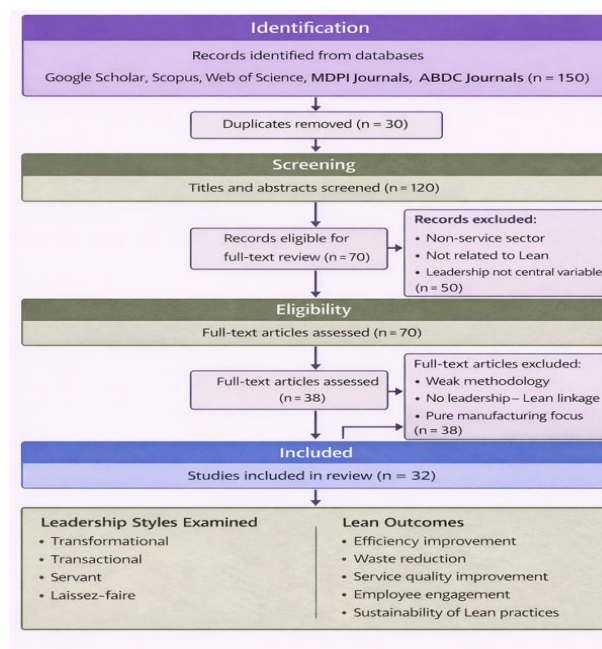


Fig.1 Methodology Flow Diagram

Search Strategy

A structured keyword-based search strategy was employed using combinations of the following terms:

“Leadership styles”

Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine search results and ensure relevance. The search was limited to English-language publications.

Identification Stage (Systematic Search Theory)

- A total of 150 studies were identified from academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, MDPI, and ABDC journals.
- The systematic search follows the evidence-based review approach suggested by *Tranfield et al. (2003)*, which emphasizes structured and transparent literature identification.
- 30 duplicate studies were removed to maintain database integrity, consistent with PRISMA guidelines and the concept of methodological rigor in systematic reviews.

Screening Stage (Relevance & Inclusion Theory)

Titles and abstracts of 120 studies were screened to determine topical relevance. Screening reflects the principle of construct validity, ensuring the studies align with the research variables—leadership and Lean implementation. 50 studies were excluded because they:

- Did not focus on the service sector
- Were unrelated to Lean practices
- Did not consider leadership as a central factor

This step aligns with theoretical sampling logic used in systematic reviews to retain conceptually relevant studies. Result: 70 studies moved to full-text review.

Eligibility Stage (Quality Assessment Theory)

70 full-text articles were assessed for methodological quality and theoretical relevance. This stage follows quality appraisal theory in systematic reviews, ensuring only reliable empirical or conceptual studies are retained. 38 studies were excluded due to:

- Weak methodological design (lack of validity/reliability)
- No clear leadership–Lean relationship
- Exclusive manufacturing focus

This reflects the principle of internal validity and ensures theoretical consistency with the research framework.

→ Result: 32 high-quality studies selected.

Inclusion Stage (Evidence Synthesis Theory)

The final 32 studies were included for systematic synthesis. This stage represents evidence integration, consistent with the knowledge accumulation theory in literature reviews. These studies form the empirical and conceptual base for examining leadership influence on Lean success.

Leadership Theory Foundation

The included studies analyze leadership using major theoretical frameworks:

- Transformational Leadership Theory (*Burns, Bass*)
→ Explains how vision, motivation, and empowerment support Lean culture.
- Transactional Leadership Theory
→ Linked with process discipline, monitoring, and performance control.
- Servant Leadership Theory (*Greenleaf*)
→ Supports employee engagement, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

- Laissez-faire Leadership Theory
→ Often associated with weak coordination and poor Lean implementation.

Lean Management Theory Link

Lean implementation outcomes align with core Lean principles such as:

- Waste elimination (Muda theory)
- Continuous improvement (Kaizen philosophy)
- Value creation for customers
- Employee involvement in process improvement

15. These outcomes reflect the socio-technical view of Lean, where leadership acts as a human enabler of process improvement.

IV CONCLUSION

The systematic review confirms that leadership style is a key determinant of successful Lean implementation in the service sector. Among the identified styles, transformational and servant leadership demonstrate the strongest positive influence on Lean outcomes, particularly in promoting efficiency, service quality, employee engagement, and long-term sustainability. Transactional leadership contributes to operational stability but is most effective when complemented by participative leadership practices. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership tends to hinder Lean implementation due to insufficient direction and organizational support. The study highlights that Lean success in service organizations depends not only on tools and techniques but also on leadership behaviors that foster participation, continuous improvement, and organizational commitment. The findings provide a theoretical basis for future empirical research and offer practical guidance for managers seeking to strengthen Lean implementation through effective leadership approaches.

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